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Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8318th meeting
Thursday, 26 July 2018, 10.15 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Skoog	(Sweden)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Temenov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Mr. Radomski
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Letter dated 1 June 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/528)

Letter dated 20 May 2018 from the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/531)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2018/655)

Letter dated 18 July 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/727)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and Ms. Justine Masika Bihamba, Synergy of Women for Victims of Sexual Violence.

Ms. Zerrougui is joining via video-teleconference from Kinshasa.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to the following documents: S/2018/528, which contains a letter dated 1 June 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council; S/2018/531, which contains a letter dated 20 May 2018 from the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo addressed to the President of the Security Council; S/2018/655, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and S/2018/727, which contains a letter dated 18 July 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

At this meeting, the Council will hear briefings by Ms. Zerrougui; Ambassador Mansour Alotaibi, Permanent Representative of Kuwait, in his capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and Ms. Bihamba.

I now give the floor to Ms. Zerrougui.

Ms. Zerrougui (*spoke in French*): I should like to thank the Council for affording me the opportunity to brief it on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Less than five months before the elections, to be held on 23 December, preparations reached a key turning point yesterday with the opening of registration centres for presidential and legislative election candidacies. The elections continue to give rise to high expectations, both among the Congolese people and the international community, as they are of key significance to shoring up stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and throughout the region.

Although significant progress has been achieved in meeting the critical benchmarks set out in the timetable, the electoral process remains a source of suspicion and mistrust between the majority and the opposition and between the opposition and the Independent National Electoral Commission. The opposition's grievances relate, inter alia, to voting machines, the electoral registry and the unresolved issue of the replacement of the representative of the Union pour la démocratie et le progrès Social (UDPS) within the Independent National Electoral Commission.

These grievances were recently reiterated by a group of five political opposition parties and platforms, including UDPS, Ensemble pour le changement, Union pour la nation congolaise, Mouvement de libération du Congo (MLC) and Dynamique de l'opposition, through a joint statement published on July 23 in Kinshasa. The statement also demands the return of high-profile personalities and the release of political prisoners within the framework of implementing the de-escalation measures set out in the 31 December 2016 agreement.

On July 24, Jean-Pierre Bemba, President of the MLC and the party's nominee for the presidential elections, held his first press conference in Brussels to confirm his return to Kinshasa on 1 August to declare his candidacy. The same day, Moïse Katumbi also announced his upcoming return without however specifying a date. In the meantime, the newly established political platform — Front commun pour le Congo — for which President Kabila was designated the moral authority, has yet to nominate a presidential candidate.

(*spoke in English*)

I am, however, encouraged to note that while encountering the disagreements that I just mentioned against the backdrop of immense logistical and financial challenges, all major political parties were able to successfully register candidates for provincial legislative elections. In my travels last week to Kolwezi, Lubumbashi and Kalemie, I heard first-hand the lengths to which political parties have gone to ensure their participation in upcoming elections. In some remote areas, candidates travelled nearly 1,500 kilometres by motorcycle to declare their candidature. I was also glad to see the engagement between the Independent National Electoral Commission and political parties, which ultimately resulted in several deadline extensions for provincial legislative candidate registration, thereby contributing to ensuring that the process is more inclusive and legitimate. Following a slow start, more than 18,000 candidacies were ultimately enrolled to compete for 715 seats. Although the final tally is yet to be published, initial indications suggest that women made up less than 12 per cent of all registered candidates. I continue to use my good offices to urge political parties to ensure greater female representation and participation in the upcoming elections.

Although I am pleased to note such a level of political engagement on the part of all parties, I remain concerned by the poor implementation of confidence-building measures. While the Minister of Justice announced the release of 4,109 prisoners, only a few of them were part of the confidence-building measures, and the release of high-profile personalities was completely ruled out. As violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms continue to impact negatively on democratic space, peaceful demonstrations are being suppressed. Civil society actors and political opponents continue to be arbitrarily arrested, and media workers threatened. Conditions leading to a level playing field are therefore not yet in place, and without progress on those fronts, the credibility and inclusivity of upcoming elections could be at risk.

On the logistical side, Council members will recall the Government's stated intent — including in the President's state of the nation address — to manage and finance elections without external support. The logistical support of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) for elections, mandated by the Security Council, was initially planned to begin today. However, thus far, no request has been received from the Independent National Electoral Commission. Although we remain ready to provide support as requested, I must note that, in the interest of responsibly managing United Nations resources, we will soon require more clarity from the Council in that regard, as the first aircraft for MONUSCO's logistical support was denied landing clearance upon an attempted arrival yesterday.

On a positive note, we were pleased to hear the Minister of Health announce the official end of the Ebola virus disease outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo this past Tuesday. In the face of that challenge, MONUSCO, together with other United Nations agencies, contributed to the Government's response by offering all available means to help contain the disease and prevent its spread to major urban centres. I commend the leadership demonstrated by the Government in confronting that challenge. Such a laudable achievement demonstrated what is possible through effective cooperation among the authorities, the United Nations and external partners.

While the country is focused on the important upcoming elections, the security environment continues to be volatile and is deteriorating in some parts of the country. We are seeing an intensification of inter-community violence and activities of local armed group coalitions that sometimes espouse a politically driven narrative. I remain particularly concerned about the Kasais, where the activities of several dissident militia factions continue; North Kivu where the Allied Democratic Forces is increasingly active; and South Kivu, Maniema and Tanganyika provinces. In all those areas, the civilian population — especially women and children — continue to pay the highest price for conflict. They are enduring grave human rights violations, displacement, challenges to their livelihoods and the disruptions to their education. I myself just returned from Tanganyika province a few

days ago, and I witnessed the unbearable conditions in which internally displaced persons are living and heard about the suffering and continuing tensions among communities.

In Ituri province, I am glad to report, tensions in Djugu have recently abated. We undertook immense efforts in support of local authorities, including intensive dialogue at the local level to reconcile communities, good-offices engagement with local and national authorities to ease tensions, strong support for judicial authorities to fight impunity, and the deployment of three standing combat deployments to the highest-risk areas. Those deployments are a realization of our protection-through-projection approach, thereby showing that results are possible where logistical capability and the right troop mindset exists. In Ituri, as elsewhere in the country, although MONUSCO's efforts can help protect civilians and mitigate the risk of further deterioration, root causes need to be addressed by Congolese authorities.

In that security context, I note with concern that MONUSCO personnel are increasingly targeted. Our troops in the Beni area have been attacked several times, as the Council is aware. We have also recently experienced a number of staff abductions, the most recent of which was only this past week in Uvira. In my visits to the eastern part of the country last week, I listened to members of our staff voice their increasing concerns about the security situation and their safety resulting from their work with the United Nations. While I am working to enhance our staff's safety and security, such events are a constant reminder of the risks that staff and troops face every day in support of MONUSCO's mandate. In this volatile context, the stakes for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the region's future stability, are high. In the coming months, MONUSCO will operate in an increasingly tense environment, while faced with high expectations. However, as Council members are aware, we will navigate through that period with fewer resources.

The General Assembly recently approved a budget reduced by $38.8 million compared to the Secretary-General's proposal — a significant reduction that further compounds the impact on our operational ability following last year's budget cuts. I do not mention that to make a plea for more resources; we all know the new financial reality facing all peacekeeping missions. I highlight it because it is important that we collectively understand that while MONUSCO's resources continue to shrink, its mandate remains the same and expectations only continue to grow. We will therefore be limited in our ability to respond to all emerging protection risks, particularly in densely populated urban areas or in areas where we have no presence. As such, I must emphasize the importance of our collective work, as the United Nations and the international community, in preventing electoral violence and ensuring the process remains on track.

(*spoke in French*)

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is at a crossroads. That is why I call on all stakeholders to seize this historic opportunity to enable the holding of inclusive, transparent and credible elections on 23 December in order to offer a more stable future to the country and its people.

The President: I thank Ms. Zerrougui for her briefing. I also convey to her, on behalf of every member of the Security Council, our strong support for the work she does and for the efforts of the men and women in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, sometimes under very difficult circumstances.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Alotaibi.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait): I have the honour to deliver a statement in my capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In my briefing this morning, it is my intention to provide an overview of the work of the Committee since I assumed the role of Chair in January. I also intend to set out a number of possible activities that the Committee may undertake over the course of the remainder of 2018.

Since assuming the role of Chair in January 2018, I have sought to continue the work of the Committee and to raise awareness of the situation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On 1 February, in continuation of its work, the Committee approved the addition to its sanctions list of the names of four individuals who continue to pose a threat to the peace and security of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Over the course of the first six months of 2018, I convened various meetings of the Committee. The speakers at those meetings included Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the

Congo (MONUSCO); a representative of the Mission's Joint Mission Analysis Centre on MONUSCO's arms embargo monitoring mandate; a representative of the United Nations Mine Action Service on weapons and ammunition management in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; a representative of the Permanent Mission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the United Nations on combating sexual violence and child recruitment in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The Committee also met with the members of the Group of Experts, who presented an overview of the findings and recommendations contained in the Group's final report (S/2018/531).

My delegation has also hosted, at the Permanent Mission of Kuwait, four gatherings of Committee members, including three informal informals on issues related to the work of the Committee. In February and April, for example, my delegation hosted informal informals with the Senior Official of the United Nations team, Mr. Robert Petit, in the course of his periodic visits to New York. The Committee continues to support Mr. Petit and his team of technical experts as they provide support to the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in its investigations into the March 2017 murders of two late members of the Group of Experts, Zaida Catalán and Michael Sharp.

Looking forward, the coming months will be a critical period for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that context, the Committee will remain vigilant and ensure that its work and that of the Group of Experts contributes to peace and stability in the country and the region. Towards that end, I intend to continue collaboration with relevant interlocutors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as those in the Great Lakes region with a view to obtaining updated information on various aspects of the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo that are relevant to the Committee's mandate and promoting further synergy in our work.

In terms of other activities that the Committee is considering, I have announced the convening of a briefing for all Member States in connection with the final report of the Group of Experts on Friday, 27 July. Over the course of the second half of the year, the Committee will likely convene a meeting to hear the Group of Experts, whose mandate was extended pursuant to resolution 2424 (2018), present its programme of work. I would also like to explore the possibility of holding meetings on the arms embargo along the lines of the workshop format that the Group of Experts recommended in its final report. As part of its continued consideration of natural resources issues, the Committee could be updated on efforts by the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Member States to address issues of illegal exploitation and smuggling of natural resources by armed groups, and on actions taken by Member States to assist the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the countries in the Great Lakes region to develop a responsible minerals trade.

The President: I thank Ambassador Alotaibi for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Bihamba.

Ms. Bihamba (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Swedish delegation, which invited me here to speak on behalf of Congolese women, who are too often the victims of sexual violence and excluded from public affairs management and peace negotiations.

I am a woman human rights defender and the President of the Board of Directors of the Synergy of Women for Victims of Sexual Violence, a platform of 35 organizations working to improve, promote, defend, respect and protect the rights of women, especially women victims of sexual violence. We are also involved in governance, advocacy, human rights protection and sustainable peacebuilding in North Kivu in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Today I would like to address three themes: the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO); the increase in sexual violence against women and girls; and the tense political climate following the failure to hold elections within the constitutional deadlines.

The decision to close some of MONUSCO's bases once again exposes the civilian population in sensitive areas. Despite rapid deployment, help often arrives too late, when the damage is already done. Due to diminished financial resources, the Joint Human Rights Office is no longer present on the ground, and as a result is no longer able to effectively document cases of serious human rights violations, which are now reported by telephone. The population also fears

disorder and spillover on election day and hopes that MONUSCO will train Congolese police officers with a view to maintaining order and securing polling stations.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the situation of women, particularly victims of sexual violence, is deteriorating day by day due to the proliferation of armed groups. These groups are at the root of recurring wars leading to mass rape and displacement, mostly of women and their children. Cases of rape and violence have increased this year by more than 60 per cent in North Kivu province.

The political climate in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is tense due to the failure to hold elections within the constitutional deadlines. Various demonstrations have been repressed by the security forces, resulting in civilian deaths, much material damage — especially to Catholic convents and churches — and the arbitrary arrests of leaders of the citizen movement, opposition politicians and human rights defenders. With five months to go before the planned elections, an improvement in the political atmosphere is far from being a reality for the activists still in prison.

In addition to this political instability and the brutal repression of dissenting voices, several legal reform projects initiated by the Congolese Government tend to further reduce freedom of expression and the Congolese civic space. Among them, one is aimed at modifying the operating regime of national and international non-governmental organizations and another is aimed at combating terrorism. If these reforms are adopted in their current terms, the key principles of the rule of law will be undermined.

The electoral law promulgated on 24 December 2017 constitutes a serious obstacle to the rights and freedoms of Congolese. Among other constraints, it requires candidates to reach a threshold of representativeness of at least 1 per cent of votes at the national level. As a result, in some electoral districts, no candidacy papers for provincial elections had been filed by the deadline. Moreover, this law particularly discriminates against women in electoral races by not taking into account their socioeconomic situation. The law requires candidates to pay a $1,000 deposit, which is an astronomical amount for women and young people, most of whom live on less than $1 a day. The Congolese Women's Forum on Resolution 1325, representing women from all provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have urged the authorities of the Republic to abandon this provision.

The use of the voting machine proposed by the Government and the Independent National Electoral Commission has also been challenged by political actors and the majority of the population for fear of electoral fraud. The Democratic Republic of the Congo currently has a population in which over 65 per cent of the people are illiterate, most of them women and young people, who will have enormous difficulty in using the machine, which has been programmed in French.

Finally, in my capacity as a woman human rights defender and Chair of the Board of Directors of Synergy of Women for Victims of Sexual Violence, and on behalf of all women victims of abuse, we recommend the following to the Security Council and to States Members of the United Nations: to pressure the Congolese Government to implement a policy that genuinely promotes women's participation in decision-making bodies and women's candidacies for appointments; to call on the Government to respect freedom of expression, the right to demonstrate and the civic space of the Congolese population; to demand that the Government respect the New Year's Eve agreement and the Constitution, that is, to respect the rule of law; to have MONUSCO restore bases in sensitive areas to ensure the effective protection of civilians and support the ongoing electoral process; to direct the Human Rights Office to effectively document human rights violations by going into the field; and to materially support civil society organizations for the promotion and defence of women's rights so that they can provide leadership training for women leaders with a view to their gaining access to decision-making positions.

I thank you once again, Mr. President, for honouring me, as a woman human rights defender, with this opportunity to make the voices of the voiceless heard.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Masika Bihamba for her briefing.

(*spoke in English*)

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I warmly thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, for her very enlightening briefing and, more broadly, for her exemplary commitment and action as well as that of her teams. I

also thank Ms. Justine Masika Bihamba, Coordinator of Synergy of Women for Victims of Sexual Violence, for her important and inspiring testimony. Finally, I thank Ambassador Alotaibi, Permanent Representative of Kuwait, for his briefing in his capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

At this crucial time for the future of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, our shared priority is clear. The aim is to hold the elections on the scheduled date in December, and to ensure that they are held in good conditions. Indeed, only full respect for the Constitution and democratic transition can guarantee stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the entire region. This is a challenge but also an historic opportunity for the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

From there, our road map is to encourage the authorities to take all steps in this direction and to call on all stakeholders to respect the spirit of consensus that prevailed when the political agreement of 31 December 2016 was signed. In this context, maintaining the unity of international partners will be crucial to the success of the process. Beyond the unity shown by the Security Council, we must continue to work closely with the African Union and the countries of the region, which play an essential role. In this regard, I welcome the adoption of the 19 July joint communiqué by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union and the Security Council, which perfectly illustrates the convergence of views between the two Councils on the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This is an essential point.

In this regard, I would particularly like to stress two elements that are essential to the success of the process under way. The first element is the need to restore Congolese confidence in the technical preparations for the elections. Most of the deadlines have been met so far, which is a positive point. The audit of the electoral register by the International Organization of la Francophonie showed that the register could be improved and the Independent National Electoral Commission undertook to make the necessary corrections. This is a good thing, and we expect concrete action to be taken quickly to that end.

However, some uncertainties remain, particularly regarding voting machines and election logistics. With respect to logistics, we have taken note of the willingness of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to pay for the organization of the elections in its entirety. However, I would like to reiterate what Ms. Zerrougui has just said, that the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) is at the disposal of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to provide logistical support. The necessary resources have been made available by the General Assembly. It is essential that the relevant authorities transmit to MONUSCO all necessary information to enable the Mission to provide such support in a timely manner, as appropriate. It is imperative that the timing and proper conduct of the elections not be called into question for logistical reasons.

With regard to voting machines, we call on the Independent National Electoral Commission to be transparent so that all citizens have access to the machines and can become familiar with how they work. There are a number of technical questions, which must be answered in order to ensure everyone's confidence in the technical preparations for the elections.

The second element required for success is the importance of ensuring the credibility of the political process leading up to the elections. Above and beyond respect for the various stages of the electoral calendar, transparency in the process, along with the opening up of the political and democratic space, are vital to the holding of credible and peaceful elections. The political meetings that took place without incident in Kinshasa in recent weeks is a positive sign. We must continue along that path.

We call in particular upon the Congolese Government to lift the ban on demonstrations and take tangible action to implement the 31 December 2016 agreement through de-escalation measures, the release of political prisoners or prisoners of conscience, and the end of politically motivated legal proceedings. All candidates should be able to compete freely and on equal footing, and voters should be able to make their choice with full awareness and without being coerced. In that regard, respect for human rights, and in particular the commitments made by the authorities to the Human Rights Council in Geneva, is obviously a crucial element.

I will end my remarks with a word on the security and humanitarian situation, which remains of concern. New pockets of tension have emerged in the east of

the country, which have resulted in several civilian casualties. Investigations of the situation in the Kasai, conducted by the Group of Experts commissioned by the Human Rights Council, have revealed that war crimes and crimes against humanity may have been committed in that region. MONUSCO took swift action to respond to tensions, which proves the relevance of its new operations concept of protection through projection. I commend the Mission on its important work and encourage it to continue its transformation in order to achieve optimal efficiency.

The Security Council has sent a clear message to the perpetrators of abuses by imposing new sanctions against individuals responsible for committing serious human rights violations. Impunity will not be tolerated. France encourages the Congolese authorities to conduct a prompt investigation into abuses reported by the Human Rights Council so that those responsible can be brought to justice.

France, together with its partners in the Security Council, the African Union and the region, will remain resolute and committed to supporting the Democratic Republic of the Congo so as to ensure that the elections are conducted in the right conditions and that they usher in a new era of stability and development for the country and its people.

Mr. Cohen (United States): I would like to thank the representative of Kuwait, as Chair of the Committee established, pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui for their briefings. We appreciate their efforts to keep the Security Council informed of progress towards elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We would especially like to thank Ms. Masika Bisamba for her presence in the Council Chamber today. We were all moved by her testimony regarding the threats against women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and inspired by her courage in seeking protection, care and justice for the survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. We thank her for her leadership.

Yesterday was an important day in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with the opening of the candidate registration period. As we have repeatedly stated, we expect President Kabila to abide by the Constitution and the December 2016 agreement. He is not eligible under Congolese law to seek a third term. The United States regrets the fact that President Kabila did not use his 19 July address to Parliament to resolve the uncertainty with regard to his intentions.

Turning now to elections preparations, 23 December is rapidly approaching. The Council authorized the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to provide logistical support to the elections. We expect the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to take advantage of the support that MONUSCO has offered. It is absolutely critical that the Independent National Electoral Commission make detailed requests for logistical support from MONUSCO in a timely fashion. We have not yet seen evidence of how the Electoral Commission would organize elections without MONUSCO's assistance. The Mission cannot afford to wait until the last moment to put a plan into action.

In addition, the Commission must take steps to ensure that voters can cast their ballots via a mechanism that is tested and trusted and guarantees the secrecy of the vote, namely, paper ballots. Deploying more than 100,000 unfamiliar, untested and possibly unworkable electronic voting machines for the first time during a critical national election poses an enormous and unnecessary risk. What do Congolese authorities plan to do if those untested voting machines malfunction on election day and jeopardize the credibility of the results? Is there a back-up plan? If so, what is it?

We must also not lose sight of the violence we have witnessed recently in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The United States commends MONUSCO's quick response to clashes in Bijombo this month but remains deeply concerned about reports of human rights abuses, with tens of thousands of people fleeing the violence. Ultimately, violence in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and in other parts of the country will not abate without genuine, credible, inclusive and peaceful elections and without a commitment to holding those responsible for such violence to account. We have not forgotten the murders of United Nations experts Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalán, and we will not stop pressing for those responsible to be held accountable.

The international community is united in those concerns, as evidenced by last week's joint communiqué with the African Union Peace and Security Council. We urge other members of the Security Council to push for well-planned elections, including through members'

bilateral conversations, and to consider the possibility of targeted sanctions against those who threaten peace and security in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Congolese people have been waiting nearly two years for an opportunity to cast their votes and choose new leaders, as outlined in their Constitution. President Kabila has committed repeatedly to respecting the Constitution and to implementing the December 2016 agreement. We are a mere five months away from election day. The time for posturing is over.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui for her comprehensive briefing and her dedicated efforts on the ground. We also thank Ambassador Mansour for his briefing on the activities of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Moreover, we thank Ms. Justine Masika Bihamba for sharing her perspective.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is at a critical juncture, and it is important that the Council have the opportunity to follow up developments with regard to preparations for the December elections. We welcome the progress made in preparing for the elections with the support of subregional, regional and international partners. The Government and all other national stakeholders must continue their efforts to create conditions that are conducive to holding credible and peaceful elections, in line with the 31 December 2016 agreement.

We note that the independent auditing report issued by the International Organization of la Francophonie (OIF) on the voter register confirmed that it was "inclusive, exhaustive and updated, but needed some improvement. We hope that that will help reinforce confidence-building measures. It is also encouraging that the presidential majority welcomed the conclusion of the OIF report. We hope the publishing of the voters' list by the Independent National Electoral Commission will help to overcome the doubts surrounding voter participation.

The coming months will be of critical importance for final preparations ahead of the 2018 elections. It is absolutely necessary that all Congolese parties make the necessary compromises with a view to preserving continuous dialogue and the spirit of consensus as the only way to conduct peaceful elections. In that regard, it was necessary that the Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council send a clear and unified message to the Congolese political actors last week through the joint communiqué adopted at the end of their annual consultation. We believethat the elements of the communiqué provide a useful framework on how we should continue to handle the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the months leading up to elections in December.

Enhancing the coordination of the United Nations, the African Union (AU), the Southern Africa Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and other international partners is necessary to ensure more coherent and effective support to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, especially at this critical juncture. In that context, although the planned visit by the Secretary-General and the AU Commission Chairperson to Kinshasa was delayed, we very much hope that it will happen next month. The idea of having the Security Council visit the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is now being proposed to happen in October, is also very welcome. The participation of the AU Peace and Security Council in that visit, in line with the agreement reached last week, will send the right signals, and we hope that all the necessary arrangements will be made to make this happen.

We appreciate the considerable technical and logistical support provided by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) for the preparation of the elections in conformity with the electoral calendar. The role of MONUSCO in support of the electoral process continues to be very important, and we fully support all the efforts of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui and the United Nations team on the ground.

The deployment of the additional rapidly deployable battalions, to be based in the troubled Kasai and Tanganyika regions, will be important for strengthening efforts aimed at containing violence in rural hotspots, which may affect the process of elections. In that spirit, we appreciate that the Secretary-General proposed the option of deploying individual police officers, while remaining within the authorized police strength of MONUSCO, which can contribute to the early warning efforts, prevention, mitigation and reduction of potential tensions during the conduct of elections. Such initiative will be effective if implemented together with the national police and local communities.

Finally, we would like to welcome the official announcement of the end of the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in accordance with the World Health Organization guidelines, and we echo the statement issued by the African Union today commending the Congolese Government for its swift and effective response allowing a coordinated and efficient intervention of all concerned partners to swiftly contain the outbreak.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Republic of Equatorial Guinea thanks Special Representative Leila Zerrougui for the important briefing she has just delivered. We are also grateful for the presence of Justine Masika Bihamba, the Congolese civil society representative, and for her statement. Lastly, we thank Ambassador Alotaibi for his briefing.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is entering a decisive phase for its immediate future. Equatorial Guinea welcomes the progress that has been made in the political and technical process for the holding of elections in December. This reflects the commitment of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to complying with the electoral calendar established on 5 November 2017 and its commitments with regard to the 31 December 2016 agreement. The measures taken demonstrate the Government's determination to effectively organize inclusive, fair and transparent elections on 23 December. We believe that only through constructive inter-Congolese dialogue will the formation of a Government of national unity lead the country to overcome the tensions we have seen and facilitate the progress of the electoral process, strengthen confidence in and the mechanisms for oversight and implementation for a transparent and inclusive process that allows voter participation under the principle of universal suffrage and the best possible conditions.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea therefore welcomes the observations made in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/655) on the political and technical processes under way for the holding of elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which show considerable progress with regard to technical and legislative preparations for the holding of elections.

Our Government commends all the measures taken with regard to the organization of the elections, including the submission of candidates from different political parties and the establishment and extension of deadlines, which reflects the will and commitment of the Government and political actors to carry out the electoral process. We also believe that we must not lose sight of or neglect the different possible post-electoral scenarios, and we must adopt the necessary preventive measures in the event of any eventuality.

With regard to technical aspects, it is important that the Independent National Electoral Commission be able to function normally and that any technical issue that gives rise to a discrepancy can be resolved satisfactorily. In that regard, we are referring specifically to the use of the voting machines. We welcome the Government's efforts to fully fund the electoral process and encourage it to continue to work and regularly strengthen its cooperation with the Commission so that the funding can be carried out and can effectively contribute to satisfactory elections. We would also like to underscore the support that can be provided by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

We recognize the States members of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region, the African Union, the International Organization of la Francophonie and the Southern Africa Development Community, as well as neighbouring States, in particular Angola, South Africa and the Congo, as facilitators of the political dialogue in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and throughout the region. We also call for their cooperation in investigating and combating the criminal networks and armed groups involved in the illegal exploitation of the country's resources. Pressure, monitoring and punishments must be brought to bear on those criminal groups to put an end to their crimes. Otherwise, the Security Council will still be dealing with problems in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for many years to come, even after the transparent elections of next December.

Allow me to commend MONUSCO for the work it has carried out in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for many years and not always in the best of circumstances. We urge all parties involved in this process, including the Government and other political actors, to stay the course of inclusive internal dialogue and refrain from any violent action that could disrupt the process.

Finally, we call on the international community to continue to resolutely support the Government, MONUSCO, the Independent National Electoral Commission and all other parties involved in this process to promote confidence-building measures to guarantee a favourable environment for the holding of peaceful elections and to fully comply with the road map until power has been peacefully transferred in an environment of peace and national harmony. A happy conclusion to the political transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo will have positive repercussions for stability throughout the region.

In conclusion, I take this opportunity to thank the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for its efforts to eradicate the Ebola outbreak and all actors who have contributed thereto. We also align ourselves with the communiqué on this issue that was issued by the African Union.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): Let me begin by thanking Special Representative Zerrougui for her very clear briefing. I would also like to thank the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) for all the important work it does in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I further thank the Ambassador of Kuwait for her briefing. Sanctions remain an important tool that the Council has at its disposal to address threats to international peace and security in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I would particularly like to thank Ms. Bihamba for her really clear and incisive briefing to the Council and in particular for the very brave work that her organization does on the ground to support and advocate for women. I thought she made some really interesting and clear recommendations at the end of her speech, and I would like to try to respond to each of those five recommendations in what I say today.

First, she spoke about the need for the Council to ask the Government to respect human rights. We strongly agree with her and we share the concerns that she has expressed and that Special Representative Zerrougui has expressed about human rights violations and abuses committed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In particular with regard to the increase in sexual exploitation and abuse, we call for all those allegations to be swiftly investigated and for those responsible for them to be brought swiftly to justice.

The Secretary-General also made a recommendation about the need for all parties to respect the 31 December 2016 political agreement and the rule of law. Again, we strongly agree with that. We welcome the limited progress so far and the steps taken by the Government towards organizing the elections, especially when it comes to voter registration. At the same time, we continue to be very concerned over the lack of progress in the implementation of the confidence-building measures in the 31 December 2016 political agreement. We call on all parties to remain committed to the agreement, including by respecting fundamental rights and the electoral timeline, not just with words but also with actions.

In two of the recommendations, the Secretary-General calls on us, as the Council, to do more to promote women's participation in politics and to materially support the organizations that do so. Again, we very much agree with those. As the Council, we all made clear when we adopted resolution 1325 (2000) that women needed to be encouraged to meaningfully participate in all stages of the peace process, and that youth also needed to be engaged. We are therefore very concerned to hear of the increase in sexual violence. I am concerned by the points raised about the impact of the electoral law on women's participation and also by the point made by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui about the shortage of women candidates that have so far been declared. We are very concerned by all of that, and we all need to work together to do more to encourage women's participation.

Finally, the Secretary-General makes some very specific points about the role of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). We take those concerns very seriously. I am not able to give a detailed response to each of them right now, but we will certainly take away those points and reflect on them. We welcome the important role that MONUSCO is playing in helping to prepare for the elections so far; however, as with other speakers, we note that challenges remain and we continue to call for cooperation between the Independent National Electoral Commission and MONUSCO as we prepare for those elections. I thank the Secretary-General for those five very clear recommendations.

In conclusion, we believe that it is vital that the Council remain closely engaged on the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the coming months in the

run-up to the elections. Like Ethiopia, we support plans for a Council visit later this year. We must continue to urge all parties to abide by the Constitution, to respect the 31 December agreement and to take concrete steps on the ground to create an environment for free and fair elections.

Mr. Radomski (Poland): I would like to begin by extending my thanks to Special Representative Leila Zerrougui, Ambassador of Kuwait Mansour Ayyad Alotaibi and Ms. Justine Masika Bihamba for their important and very informative briefings.

The upcoming months will be critical in preserving all efforts made by international, regional and national actors in stabilizing the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Poland commends the progress made in the technical preparations of the elections. However, we are still deeply concerned by the distrust among political actors over several crucial issues, mainly the implementation of the confidence-building measures and opening of the political space. A lack of genuine commitment and goodwill on the part of all the political actors might undermine the free and credible electoral process. Poland calls upon the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ensure that the elections are organized on time and with the requisite conditions of transparency, inclusivity and security.

In that context, we emphasize the importance of the timely invitation of international electoral observers. The peaceful and timely transfer of power in January 2019, as set out in the electoral calendar and in accordance with the Congolese Constitution, is a prerequisite for the stabilization of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Poland welcomes the commitment by regional partners to support the electoral process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

While praising the efforts taken by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and international actors to contain the Ebola virus outbreak, we remain gravely concerned about the humanitarian situation, which is driven by the destabilizing actions of foreign and domestic armed groups. Their activities, including violence against civilians, illicit trafficking, trade exploitation and smuggling of natural resources, have a negative impact on the security, economy and development of the country. We therefore call for the full implementation of the arms embargo, travel ban and assets freeze, as they are an integral part of the fight against those type of crimes. Poland is also worried by the continuing increase in human rights abuses, including sexual violations. We call upon the Government to strengthen measures to improve security, fight the impunity of the perpetrators of those crimes and protect victims.

In conclusion, let me reiterate Poland's support for the recommendations proposed by the Secretary-General in his report (S/2018/655). We praise the important work carried out by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Special Representative Leila Zerrougui. There is no doubt that in the wake of the upcoming elections the role of the Mission is ever more important.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the convening of this meeting and for the important briefings delivered by Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Ambassador Mansour Alotaibi and Ms. Justine Masika Bihamba.

Peru notes with concern the grave security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly in the east of the country, as well as the humanitarian crisis affecting millions of Congolese. We deplore and condemn the human rights violations, including sexual violence, that are occurring in increasing numbers in the country, as we have heard this morning.

In such a complex scenario, we would first like to underscore the importance of creating an atmosphere of trust, transparency, credibility and inclusion with a view to ensuring a safe and mass turnout of citizens and all political forces in the current electoral process, as well as the peaceful recognition of its results. We highlight the efforts made by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in that regard, which are focused on complying with the electoral calendar and completing the audit of voter registration, with the support of the International Organization of la Francophonie. In addition, we consider it urgent to deepen the following five main lines of action.

First, confidence-building must continue, in accordance with the measures set forth in the political agreement of 31 December 2016 to guarantee the free participation of all political forces and their candidates.

Secondly, the security of all political actors and their supporters must be guaranteed, including commitments among all forces and measures to prevent

acts of intimidation and neutralize divisive rhetoric and incitement to violence.

Thirdly, verification of the functioning of the voting machines is recommended, in order to ensure that it is not possible to manipulate the results. That should be done through due coordination with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the participation of the opposition and civil society.

Fourthly, adequate financing of the process must be ensured, and the needs for support from MONUSCO and eventually, the international community must be identified in a timely manner.

Fifthly, it is important for the Government to determine the role of the team of international experts and regional and subregional organizations with a view to ensuring their participation and issuing appropriate invitations.

With regard to the security situation, we would like to highlight the important role played by MONUSCO and its joint action with the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo, as well as the Intervention Brigade. We appreciate the success achieved in reducing intercommunal violence and encouraging the return of displaced persons in Ituri and Tanganyika. We note, however, that security is still precarious in South and North Kivu.

Regarding the human rights situation, we consider it necessary for MONUSCO to expand its monitoring role, particularly with regard to the increase in complaints against State agents registered in recent months. The authorities must cooperate with the investigations and punish those responsible.

Regarding the humanitarian situation, we deem it essential to strengthen the cooperation of the United Nations, the African Union and other humanitarian agencies and cooperating sources, based on an immediate support strategy. We highlight the coordination with the World Health Organization to control the Ebola outbreak. In addition to the electoral process, it is essential to address the root causes of the crisis. This means promoting sustainable development, improving the governance of agriculture, generating rural employment and preventing the exploitation of natural resources, among other urgent measures required to build sustainable peace.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands) (*spoke in French*): I thank the three briefers for their statements highlighting the many facets of the ongoing crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I am especially proud to see Ms. Jutsine Masika Bihamba among us today. She was the first winner of our national human rights champions prize. Her presence here highlights yet again the gratitude of the international community for her important work in the fight against sexual violence and on behalf of the protection of civilians, women and children in particular.

On behalf of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, I would like to address three points today: first, the electoral process; secondly, the current humanitarian and security situation; and thirdly, the crucial role of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in the coming months.

Concerning the electoral process, last week the Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council urged the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to guarantee the holding of elections on 23 December. Progress is certainly being made in legislative and technical preparations, but the confidence of many stakeholders in the process is low. A year and a half has passed since the New Year's Eve agreement. The Council and the regional and international stakeholders have repeatedly called for the full implementation of the confidence-building measures.

There is a great deal of work left to do. More than 100 political prisoners remain imprisoned. The harassment, intimidation and threats faced by many members of civil society organizations and parties must stop. The total ban on demonstrations has not been lifted. The political space is shrinking. The participation of women in elections is another aspects that requires our attention and support. The Democratic Republic of the Congo cannot afford to hold elections that lack credibility. The women and men of the Democratic Republic of the Congo aspire to a credible transfer of power, in line with the Constitution, the New Year's Eve agreement and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. We must see significant progress.

We take note of the fact that the Democratic Republic of the Congo has postponed the visit of the Secretary-General and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission that was scheduled for earlier this

month. We hope that a new date can be fixed quickly. Cancellation could diminish the confidence of the international community and the Congolese people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's commitment to the New Year's Eve agreement. The Security Council must continue to monitor the situation and remain closely involved, including through a possible visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

My second point concerns the current humanitarian and security situation. Elections are just one piece of the puzzle. The humanitarian situation remains extremely worrying. Three months ago, the donor community pledged $500 million for emergency assistance. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has announced the creation of a humanitarian forum and fund. Millions of Congolese, however, urgently need humanitarian measures right. Hunger, massive internal displacement and health risks are heightening the threats to their security. It is a vicious circle. Armed groups and their ravages are growing. They terrorize vulnerable communities, attack units of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo, and kill peacekeepers. While security has improved in Ituri and Tanganyika provinces, it has further declined in North and South Kivu provinces. The situation in some parts of Kasai remains serious.

It is women and children who pay the highest price, including due to systematic sexual violence, the recruitment of child soldiers, sexual slavery and impediments to humanitarian assistance. The Council cannot remain a passive observer. It must act, including through the sanctions regime, and put an end to the impunity of those whose involvement in these practices has been proven.

My third point concerns the role of MONUSCO. The challenges are complex and numerous. The Mission's mandate is to protect civilians and to support the implementation of the New Year's Eve agreement and the electoral process. These two priorities require the full political commitment of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, clarity concerning the demands and the expectations of MONUSCO, as well as the full support of the Council. We are concerned that a further deterioration in the security situation would pose a real challenge to the implementation of the mandate.

I congratulate the Special Representative and her team for their ongoing adjustments and responses to multiple threats in the most difficult circumstances. The protection through projection approach will require continuous and enormous efforts if it is to bear fruit. The Secretary-General's letter on emergency planning (S/2018/727) emphasizes that fact once again.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has many partners willing to help, listen and contribute to strengthening the country's security and stability. The situation deserves our full attention. There must be no doubt about our commitment or our willingness to act. Time is pressing.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), for the quality of her briefing.

We also thank Ambassador Mansour Alotaibi, Chairman of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for his excellent work at the head of that body, and Ms. Justine Masika Bihamba, head of the the non-governmental organization Synergy of Women for Victims of Sexual Violence, whose briefing painted a comprehensive picture of this issue.

Five months ahead of the presidential, legislative and provincial elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, my delegation welcomes the progress made by the Independent National Electoral Commission in the implementation of the electoral process, including the finalization of the electoral lists and their audit by the experts of the International Organization of la Francophonie; the enactment of law on the distribution of seats in the future Parliament and the electoral law; the end of the regisatrion period for provincial elections candidacies; and the opening of the registration period for candidacies to the presidential and legislative elections.

My country urges all Congolese political actors to be part of this positive dynamic by creating conditions conducive to the holding of peaceful elections, in accordance with the recommendation of the joint communiqué issued at the meeting of the United Nations Security Council and the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, held on 19 July in New York. Côte d'Ivoire also notes the commitment of the Congolese authorities to organizing the elections in due time and to ensure their financing. It encourages them

to take appropriate measures with a view to ensuring the availability of the necessary resources in order to avoid delays likely to jeopardize the proper implementation of the electoral calendar.

Despite the positive momentum that has been observed in the implementation of the electoral timetable, my delegation remains alarmed by the socio-political and security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On the socio-political front, given the opening of the registration period for presidential election candidacies, a key stage in the electoral process, my delegation encourages the Congolese authorities to lift the prohibition on public demonstrations and to create political conditions conducive to the expression of fundamental individual and collective freedoms. This recommendation is justified by the fact that no incidents were reported during the public demonstrations organized by political groups.

Côte d'Ivoire notes also a persistent divergence of views among the Congolese stakeholders, specifically rejection of the use of voting machines and the conclusions of the voter register audit by certain political parties and civil-society organizations. In this regard, Côte d'Ivoire strongly encourages the Congolese authorities, all political actors and the relevant civil-society organizations jointly to seek satisfactory compromises so as to ensure the holding of credible and peaceful elections on 23 December, as planned.

At the security level, the deterioration of the situation as a consequence of the activities of armed groups in North and South Kivu and their nefarious effects on the civilian population, specifically the deterioration of the humanitarian situation, remain a source of concern to my delegation. In this context, we welcome the efforts undertaken by the Congolese armed forces and MONUSCO to tackle the threat posed by armed groups. We encourage its forces to further shore up their joint operations to stabilize those provinces experiencing insecurity. My delegation further notes with satisfaction the commitment undertaken by donors during the 13 April international humanitarian conference held in Geneva to earmark $528 million in support of humanitarian operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

My delegation welcomes the commitment of MONUSCO, which, in cooperation with the country's authorities, has been lending technical support to the Independent National Electoral Commission and has contributed, thanks to its good offices, to a reduction in intercommunal tensions in violence-plagued areas.

To conclude, Côte d'Ivoire calls on subregional, regional and international organizations, specifically the Southern African Development Community, the Economic Community of Central African States, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the African Union, the European Union, the International Organization of la Francophonie and the United Nations to synergize their actions in support of their support for the implementation of the 31 December 2016 agreement.

Mr. Temenov (Kazakhstan): We join others in thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui for her highly informative update. We would also like to thank Ambassador Mansour Alotaibi, Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ms. Bihamba, civil-society representative, for their insightful briefings.

Regarding the political situation, the delegation of Kazakhstan agrees on the importance of the presidential and legislative elections scheduled for 23 December being held in a timely, free and credible manner. Although commendable efforts have been made by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to reach key electoral milestones, challenges remain to be addressed. We commend the International Organization of la Francophonie (IOF) on having conducting an independent audit of the voter register and note the importance of the implementation by the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo of the relevant recommendations.

We must support all confidence-building measures provided in the 31 December 2016 agreement among all political actors. It is critical to ensure an inclusive political transition of power that is based on respect for fundamental rights, including the full participation of women. We note the role of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the African Union and IOF in supporting the vital electoral process.

The security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is deteriorating in some parts of the country owing to the increasing activities of armed groups in North and South Kivu, which have resulted in a high death toll among innocent civilians and

selfless peacekeepers. We support the reconfiguration of MONUSCO so as to enable it to better address security issues as well as ensure greater local community outreach and expanded measures under the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme, together with a comprehensive approach to the protection of civilians.

We agree with previous speakers that the increasing number of documented cases of conflict-related sexual violence committed against women and children requires immediate attention and action. An increase in State authority and reliable security and law-enforcement systems throughout the country are crucial in order to reinforce the capabilities of the Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo and of MONUSCO.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, we express concern at the humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is cause for alarm given that the number of people in need of assistance and protection is the highest thus far. We welcome the results of the donor conference held in Geneva and call on donors to fulfil their pledges to effectively address the dire humanitarian situation.

As the recent Ebola outbreak has exacerbated the suffering of the people, we commend the swift and coordinated response by the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with support from MONUSCO and the United Nations system, to save lives and contain the spread of this lethal and highly contagious virus.

Finally, we welcome the outcome of the twelfth annual joint consultative meeting held in New York on 19 July, at which the members of the Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council stepped up cooperation between the two sides. This fresh momentum for enhanced cooperation must continue in order to collectively address existing complexities together with regional and international partners. This will enable us to consolidate the gains achieved and move forward towards the key goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the AU's Agenda 2063. We will therefore have many best practices for the Silencing the Guns by 2020 strategy that can be shared with others in the region.

Kazakhstan stands ready to work with others to bring stability to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which will have a positive impact on the wider region.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to express our gratitude for the briefings that we heard from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Ms. Leila Zerrougui; Ambassador Mansour Alotaibi of Kuwait in his capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and Ms. Justine Masika Bihamba.

We welcome the ongoing progress and commitment demonstrated by the Democratic Republic of the Congo to meet the deadlines set out in the electoral calendar, in particular with respect to the promulgation of the law on the distribution of seats for the national, legislative, provincial and local elections. We welcome also the publication of the list of platforms and political parties. We have taken note of the audit of voter register, which took place in an inclusive atmosphere bringing together members of the Majorité présidentielle, members of civil society and regional and subregional organizations. We therefore hope that all registered voters will be able to cast their ballot in the elections.

We reiterate that to ensure the effective holding of elections leading to a peaceful transfer of power, and in order to ease tensions at the political level, the parties must implement the confidence-building measures enshrined in the 31 December 2016 agreement. We deplore the fact that these measures had not been fully implemented by the deadline, which has passed, and therefore call once again for their full and effective implementation. We believe that the Government and the opposition must work together in order to make headway in such implementation. Although the Government must take the initiative and the leadership role in such implementation, the measures will not be practicable without the participation of the opposition. We therefore appeal to all parties to cooperate in the run-up to the holding of transparent, credible, peaceful and inclusive elections.

We believe that the full and effective participation of women at all stages of the elections, as well as that of young people, is vital, in keeping with the joint communiqué issued by the Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council at their twelfth annual joint consultative meeting, held on 19 July.

On another front, we support the initiatives and good offices of the Special Representative. We welcome her meetings with various stakeholders aimed at allowing for an exchange of views and ensuring a coherent and coordinated approach on the part of the United Nations and regional actors. We also welcome the meetings held with various authorities, political platforms and civil-society groups to discuss the electoral process.

We also commend the support for the Democratic Republic of the Congo provided by regional organizations, such as the Southern African Development Community, the Economic Community of Central African States and the African Union, among others. We encourage them to pursue their efforts, in close cooperation with the Government, to meet the political and security challenges that the country is facing. Similarly, we support the work of MONUSCO, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region in preparing the holding of elections, and we encourage them to continue their collaborative work with the Independent National Electoral Commission.

We pay tribute to those who gave their lives for the cause of peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We commend MONUSCO's work in connection with measures taken for the protection of civilians. We also welcome its work to reduce violence in areas of the country by implementing projects to reduce community violence, which have led to the return of 800 displaced persons since April. We call for the pursuit of such projects, in conjunction with MONUSCO's efforts aimed at reconciliation among communities and within the framework of the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy, focusing on stabilization and the restoration of State authority in the country.

The challenges faced by the Democratic Republic of the Congo have increased exponentially, and their solution lies not only in the holding of elections, but also in addressing the root causes of the conflict. One of those is the lack of control over natural resources, which is helping to prolong the crisis, the fragmentation of armed groups and the systematic exploitation of those resources by multinational corporations that operate unchecked and whose revenue can be used to fund continuing instability in the country. Accordingly, we believe that, in order to deal with that issue, achieving control of areas rich in natural resources and their sovereign administration must be an essential goal, in terms of both a cessation of hostilities and economic development. When a country maintains effective control of its resources and there is political will to administer them for the benefit of the population, it is possible to achieve a structural change leading to stabilization and the strengthening of the rule of law.

In that regard, we commend the work of Kuwait, in its capacity as chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and we agree that Committee members must be updated on the efforts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other States to address questions concerning the illegal exploitation and smuggling of natural resources by armed groups and on measures taken to help the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the countries of the region to develop responsible commercial trade in minerals, with the understanding that strategies must be developed leading to the consolidation of peace in the post-electoral process.

We also express our solidarity with the victims of the Ebola outbreak and commend the Congolese authorities, the international community and the World Health Organization for their prompt response to that health crisis. We are concerned about the humanitarian and security crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo caused by armed groups, as well as by increasing intercommunal violence, particularly in the regions of Ituri, Kasai, the Kivus and Tanganyika. We condemn in the strongest terms the many abuses committed against the population. We call on all armed groups to immediately end all forms of violence, including violations and abuses against children, and other destabilizing activities, including the illicit exploitation and trafficking of natural resources. Those groups must immediately and permanently disband, lay down their weapons, reject violence and release the children whom they hold within their ranks.

Lastly, we welcome the cooperation of the international community and other international partners in raising funds to meet humanitarian needs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We call on them to pursue such efforts, in continued cooperation with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in strict respect of its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the floor to speak this time in my national capacity.

First of all, I thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) for her briefing, and I thank Ms. Bihamba for her valuable briefing at the beginning of this meeting.

My statement is a brief one. I will address three key points.

The first concerns the political issue. The political situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has entered a decisive phase, governed by the upcoming legislative and presidential elections. We hope that those elections will be held in a free and impartial way on the agreed date of 23 December, and that all sectors of the Congolese people will be able to participate and vote in accordance with Congolese laws and the Congolese Constitution. The process of rebuilding confidence should be considered among all the Congolese political parties as stipulated in the political agreement of 31 December 2016. We recall here the joint communiqué of the Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council issued on 19 July, which calls on all political parties to work together in that direction.

Second is the security situation. The ongoing violence and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly in the South Kivu and North Kivu regions, which had seen military escalation and attacks over the past few months, requires an immediate and serious response, given that the armed conflicts there directly affect unarmed civilians and drain the natural and human resources of the country. In that regard, we commend the significant efforts of MONUSCO and its members to withstand and repel those attacks. We call on all parties behind the conflict and violence to end those clashes so as to spare the lives of civilians and achieve the desired stability in the security sector.

Third is the humanitarian situation. The ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a major concern. Nearly 13 million people, including displaced persons and refugees, are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. The international community should offer them significant assistance in meeting their humanitarian needs and finding appropriate solutions to mitigate the suffering of those in humanitarian need.

With regard to the Ebola virus, which several colleagues have mentioned, there is fear that it will spread in Equateur province. We welcome the announcement by the Ministry for Health of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on Tuesday that the spread of this epidemic is now under control. We commend the tireless efforts of the Government, together with the United Nations, the World Health Organization and MONUSCO, to eliminate this disease.

Mr. Zhang Dianbin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui; Ambassador Alotaibi and Ms. Bihamba for their briefings.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo occupies an important geographical location, and its peace, stability and political process also attract the broad attention of the international community, in particular the countries of the region. Currently, the country is facing security and political challenges. The Security Council should therefore assess the impact of various factors on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and help the Congolese Government to strengthen its security capacity-building and provide constructive assistance, with an emphasis on seeking African solutions to African problems.

China maintains that a political solution is the only way to resolve the issues of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Regional and subregional organizations, including the African Union and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, and countries of the region, are most familiar with the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the surrounding areas. The Security Council should continue to support them in playing a leading role in mediation and encourage organizations and countries of the region to enhance communication and engagement with Congolese parties through their respective channels. In particular, we should focus on listening to the views of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and respecting its ownership of the political process, as well as encouraging all the parties to take concrete action in order to get back on a path to a political settlement through dialogue and consultation, with a view to effectively implementing the political agreement of 31 December 2016. The international community should work to address the root causes of the

conflict and help the country to deal with its social and economic development issues, focusing on increased investment in the areas of education, agriculture and infrastructure construction.

The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo plays an important role in maintaining peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. China commends the courage and dedication of the peacekeepers, who are risking their lives as they work to deliver on their mandate. The international community should improve its peacekeeping capacity-building through bilateral and multilateral cooperation in order to ensure peacekeepers' safety and security.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for her update on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as on the implementation of the political agreement of 31 December 2016 and the country's preparations for elections.

We have taken note of the Secretary-General's latest report on the development of events in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2018/655) and we definitely share his opinion that ensuring that the elections scheduled for 23 December are held on time will help to reduce the tensions in Congolese society. In that regard, we would like to draw attention to President Kabila's recent address to the National Assembly, in which the leader of the Democratic Republic of the Congo once again affirmed his determination to abide by the Constitution, which we see as an appropriate and timely sign. We would like to see the opposition forces reject their negative agenda too.

We note the importance of working to ensure that the Independent National Electoral Commission's electoral calendar and revised voting dates are adhered to. That will require support for the electoral process from the international community, including by using the logistical capabilities of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). We note the measures that Kinshasa has taken with regard to the technical and legislative preparations for voting, including the timely enactment of laws on the distribution of seats in the provincial legislatures and local councils and the publication of a definitive list of the political parties and associations permitted to participate in the elections. It is important that the process of auditing the voter register is being conducted under the auspices of the International Organization of la Francophonie, and in our view the fact that half of the country's political parties have signed the electoral code of conduct is a positive development.

However, we would urge our colleagues on the Security Council not to make an issue of the decision taken by the National Electoral Commission to use electronic voting machines. This is not about an electronic vote count, as many have mistakenly said. The equipment is to be used only to make preparing and printing the ballot papers considerably easier, while the vote count will still be done manually, as our colleagues from the Democratic Republic of the Congo have assured us more than once. We agree that in order to avoid problems, Kinshasa should provide stable financing for the election preparations and strengthen the coordination of its work with MONUSCO.

We do not deny the importance of ensuring that the authorities mobilize to implement confidence-building measures, including on the emblematic cases referred to in the political agreement regarding political actors who are outside the country. However, we urge all the country's opposition forces to cooperate with Kinshasa and the Electoral Commission and to avoid any demonstrations of violence. We also consider it crucial to ensure respect for the sovereignty and legislature of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We believe that the role of the United Nations Mission in the organization and conduct of elections should not go beyond the framework of the mandate outlined in resolution 2409 (2018). The protection of civilians in the context of the elections should be carried out with full respect for the basic principles of peacekeeping and without any interference in Kinshasa's internal affairs. In particular, under no circumstances should MONUSCO take any action that could be interpreted as support for a specific Congolese party. We believe that the citizens of the Democratic Republic of the Congo must decide their own destiny, while the international community's job is to assist them in areas where their help is genuinely solicited. It is also important to remember that the elections themselves are no panacea. It is vital not to lose sight of the importance of resolving the underlying causes of the crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The President: I will now make a brief statement in my capacity as the representative of Sweden.

I want to thank Ms. Zerrougui and Ambassador Alotaibi for their briefings and, not least, to say a special word of thanks to Ms. Bihamba, our civil-society briefer today. Her remarks to the Council highlight not only the challenges that the women of the Democratic Republic of the Congo face but also their resilience, and her reflection here of women's desire and determination to be agents of change in their communities and their country. She also made some very relevant and pertinent recommendations.

The elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo planned for 23 December represent an essential step on the path to resolving the political challenges facing the country. Last week in New York, the Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council discussed the situation as part of their twelfth annual joint consultative meeting. The communiqué issued following that meeting (SC/13430), as well as the most recent statement by the African Union, the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the United Nations on the Peace and Security Cooperation Framework, send a clear signal and demonstrate the international consensus on the need to hold credible and inclusive elections on 23 December in line with the Congolese Constitution and the intra-Congolese agreement of 31 December 2016. The confidence-building measures are especially important, given the importance of increasing trust and confidence in the process among all the parties.

The humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains dire and extremely worrying. The outbreak of Ebola virus disease in Equateur province on 8 May presented the communities affected with an additional major challenge. We commend the successful management by the Government and its international partners of the outbreak, which was declared at an end earlier this week. We encourage the same commitment from international partners with regard to their support for humanitarian action in the Democratic Republic of the Congo through the 2018 humanitarian response plan. The needs are growing, while only 21 per cent of the response plan's requirements has been met. For the country's 7.7 million food-insecure people and 2.2 million acutely malnourished children, every dollar counts. We encourage everyone to try to do more.

With the already appalling levels of human rights violations and abuse, we are deeply concerned about the increasing number of violations being reported in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including an increased incidence of sexual and gender-based violence, as Ms. Bihamba has already told us. The high percentage of violations attributed to State agents is particularly worrying. Accountability for such crimes is essential, both to ensure justice for the survivors and to promote change by ending impunity. We urge the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with the support of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to continue to strengthen efforts in that regard.

Sixteen months after the fact, the murders of Zaida Catalán and Michael Sharp, two United Nations experts reporting to the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, remain unsolved. We fully support the work of the United Nations and the follow-on mechanism established by the Secretary-General and led by Mr. Robert Petit. We reiterate the need for the Congolese authorities to improve their cooperation with him and his team. It is important that the Sanctions Committee and the Security Council continue to follow developments in the matter closely until the truth has been established and the perpetrators have been held accountable. We are grateful to the Chair of the Committee for all his work, including the recurring Sanctions Committee meetings on the follow-up mechanism.

The year 2018 is a crucial one for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Credible, transparent, inclusive and peaceful elections can contribute to lasting peace and stability. It is essential that the Council and the region continue to stand united and work with the Government to support the people of the country in the exercise of their democratic rights.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Gata Mavita Wa Lufuta (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): It is an honour and a pleasure to congratulate you, Mr. President, as your presidency of the Council is drawing to a close, and to express my delegation's esteem and appreciation for the leadership, expertise and efficiency with which you have

conducted the work of the Security Council this month. My delegation would also like to take this opportunity to once again thank you and the other members of the Council for your availability and the unfailing interest you have always shown in my country's situation.

My delegation takes note of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/655) on the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) submitted for the Council's consideration and thanks Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for introducing it. While we appreciate the value of the report's content, I would like to take this opportunity to focus on three points that my delegation considers particularly important to clarify for the Security Council. I will therefore discuss the political, security and humanitarian situations in turn.

As highlighted in paragraph 2 of the Secretary-General's report, the political situation in my country continues to be dominated by preparations for the elections, which are due to take place on 23 December. In this respect, it should be stressed that the process is coming along well. After the closing of the audit of the voter register, the Independent National Electoral Commission proceeded to clean it up by eliminating duplicate registrations, reducing the number of voters on the rolls to 40 million. It then made the electoral calendar public before launching an awareness and education campaign on technical and operational issues, with the aim of building trust, removing doubts and maintaining contact with the various stakeholders in the process for credible, transparent and inclusive elections.

One of the issues in this campaign has revolved around the machines that will be used to print the ballot papers. It is important to point out here that the machines will not be voting for the voters but will simply print the ballots that the voters will put into the ballot boxes themselves. The political parties and groupings from both the opposition and the majority, as well as civil society, have all participated in this campaign. In the same context, Parliament has enacted various complementary legal provisions associated with the process, including one on the distribution of seats. For its part, the International Organization of la Francophonie audited the electoral register and made recommendations for its improvement and reliability. The process is now at the candidacy-filing stage. Candidacy filings for the provincial elections were submitted between 24 June and 8 July. So far, the Electoral Commission has received 19,437 applications. For the parliamentary and presidential elections, candidacy filings started yesterday, Wednesday, 25 July, and will continue until 8 August.

While under our Constitution it is the job of the Independent National Electoral Commission to organize the electoral process, the success of this undertaking also depends on the proper handling of disputes by the courts and tribunals. In order to ensure that the courts are as well prepared as possible to handle the task properly, the Superior Council of Magistrates and the Electoral Commission organized, with the financial support of the Government, the United Nations Development Programme/*Projet d'appui au cycle électoral au Congo* and the American Bar Association, a capacity-building workshop for training magistrates on the management of electoral litigation. The workshop brought together a significant sample of judges from courts across the country.

It has always been my Government's desire to hold good elections in a peaceful atmosphere. That presupposes the commitment of all political actors from both the majority and the opposition, who must refrain from comments and attitudes likely to create a climate of tension and provoke disorder. Now that the electoral process is sufficiently advanced and is in the final stretch, my Government expects all the country's political actors, from every political wing, to demonstrate the best possible attitude of constructive support to the process through positive action. We also expect the same from our international partners, who are often conspicuous for their interference from all sides.

In this regard, my Government appreciates the support and assistance of such regional partners as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), whose Electoral Council has just made a working visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This visit, a prelude to the SADC Heads of State and Government meeting to be held in August, enabled the Electoral Commission and SADC's Electoral Council to acknowledge the progress made in the electoral process and discuss the implementation of the logistical prerequisites for the success of the elections, regarding which we informed the SADC delegation about our acquisition and deployment of various materials from China, South Korea and South Africa.

With regard to de-escalating the political situation, we do not think that it would be useful to repeat explanations that the Council has already heard many times. What is important to note, in our humble opinion, is that the Government has already taken a series of steps to meet the requirements set out in the political agreement of 31 December 2016 regarding the release of so-called political prisoners. Those who were in this category have in fact been released. The only situation that is still pending and under the courts' jurisdiction is that concerning the so-called emblematic cases. As we have already pointed out in several statements to the Council, it should be pointed out that the persons concerned in these cases have all been charged with offences under ordinary law. The Council will agree that we cannot ask the public authorities, who are supposed to promote the rule of law and the equality of citizens before the law, to interfere in such situations without violating the Constitution by creating a two-tier justice system in the country.

Finally, I cannot close this chapter without pointing out, with regard to the financing of the electoral process, that for the Government of my country, as everywhere else in the world, elections are a matter of national sovereignty. As a result, they can be financed only by the Government, which is why my country has decided to finance them on its own. As the Electoral Commission informed the SADC Electoral Council, those of our partners who would like to help can do so by providing logistical assistance to the Commission in the form of aircraft, rolling stock and operational facilities.

With regard to the security situation, the report under consideration brings up the situation in the eastern part of the country and, more specifically, in North and South Kivu, with the ongoing presence of the Allied Democratic Forces and the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, as well as other emerging armed groups. My Government is concerned about the situation and has not stood idly by. We remain committed to ending the insecurity in that part of the country. My Government's engagement has restored calm in Tanganyika province, where there were clashes between Bantus and Pygmies, and Ituri province, where the violence that had forced people to flee to Uganda have been defused. However, the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) are continuing their operations to eliminate the negative forces that are still active in North and South Kivu.

As we have always underscored in our various statements to the Council, combating foreign and national armed groups in that part of our country demands the joint efforts of my Government and the United Nations if we are to eliminate them completely. In that regard, the Council has always stressed the importance of cooperation between MONUSCO and the FARDC. In the same vein, at the MONUSCO mandate renewal in March (see S/PV.8216), my Government requested that the Intervention Brigade become operational. We regret to say that in the four months since then, the situation has not improved. Besides that, we all know that the armed groups' get their income, arms and ammunition primarily through the illicit exploitation and plundering of natural resources, and we also all know that those natural resources pass through neighbouring countries or multinational corporations based in those countries and elsewhere. Apart from the measures taken by my Government, it is important that the Council take appropriate steps not only to deter the beneficiaries of this illicit trade but also to help break up and eliminate the armed groups.

With regard to the issue of sexual violence, without going into it to deeply, I would like to note that my Government will continue its efforts to combat that scourge.

Given the sporadic pockets of violence throughout the country and the consequences of the displacement of the population, along with the armed conflicts in neighbouring countries that have brought a flood of refugees into our country, it is perfectly understandable that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is experiencing a difficult humanitarian situation. However, it is not as acute as some have been led to believe. During its session on 30 March, the Government registered 231,346 internally displaced persons in 79 sites spread throughout our country. In order to address the situation, we have established a national humanitarian solidarity fund and set up a humanitarian response programme for rehabilitation and development. It goes without saying that any support that international partners would like to give us to assist people in need is welcome. Also in connection with the humanitarian situation, we should point out that our country had to once again deal with an Ebola epidemic, which has just ended. My Government was grateful for the assistance provided by the World Health Organization and non-governmental medical organizations in responding to the epidemic.

I should not conclude without once again thanking the Council on behalf of the people and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for its tireless efforts to restore peace in my country. I would like to reassure the Council of my country's commitment to holding elections in accordance with the electoral calendar. Since the elections cannot be changed, my Government calls on all stakeholders, in good faith, to denounce any act, regardless of whether it is perpetrated by Congolese or foreigners, that could derail the process, and on those who are still doubters to have a positive and constructive attitude to the process. The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is often deliberately exaggerated by the media. It is up to the Security Council to support us in following through with the process, which is the only way we can achieve the peace and stability that are the purpose of consolidating democracy in my country.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.